

June 21 2008

Clair Morris  
The Clerk  
Rural Development Sub-Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay CF 99 NA.

Dear Ms Morris,

I am writing to add my voice to the growing chorus of those who believe passionately that the small local school is essential to the survival of healthy rural life, apart from the fact that young children reach their potential most successfully when they begin their schooling with friends and neighbours within walking distance of home.

In this village the school has been the focus of local gatherings and events of all kinds for generations, especially since younger people become less involved with church and chapel. The shop closed twenty years ago and there is no pub. However, grants have enabled the community hall to be renovated recently and it is well used – most often by local people who have children or grandchildren in the village school.

This is the third time in twenty years that we have had to fight to keep our school open. We are not alone. In several European countries they understand how important the school is to rural life, as well as the healthy development of their children, and therefore subsidise them when numbers fall temporarily. In Llanegryn numbers have been rising, since many young couples have settled here.

One of the problems seems to have been the difficulty of getting the calibre of teacher required to run these schools. Perhaps if head teachers were given a better chance to develop their ideas, with less interference and paper work, the situation would improve. Wales has already shown itself to be more enlightened than England by getting rid of too much testing. We can lead the way in the recovery of common sense and child centred teaching again( since education lost its way in the race for meaningless 'results'). The sense of security a child experiences at school is as important to self motivation and learning ability as the home is and, in the early days even more so, when home, school and community should not be separated.

Would it not be possible to separate infants from juniors when considering the problems ? It is quite damaging for under sevens to be driven or bussed to a big school full of strangers. Some of the best things that happen in this thriving village at the moment happen because we have a school here. After school children can play together, visit each other on foot or by bike and their parents more easily share child-care. I dread to think what life would be like without it.

In the very near future, considering the peaking of oil and gas supplies, everything is going to have to become more localised again. Wales, with imagination and vision, has a chance of adapting more successfully than many places to these challenges. To close village schools at this point in time would be a tragic mistake, not easily remedied.

I really hope all these issues will be considered so that our small local schools can remain the regenerative hub of every small community. More than ever these days we must remember that "Small IS Beautiful !".

Yours sincerely

Jane Whittle

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jane Whittle". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name. A long horizontal line is drawn underneath the signature, extending from the start of the first word to the end of the last word.